Russell Links Cuban Crisis, Viet Troubles

PM 8/31/65

Sen. Richard B. Russell said yesterday that the war in Viet-Nam might have been shortened if the United States had forcibly removed Soviet missiles from Cuba in 1962.

The Georgia Democrat, in a copyrighted interview in U.S. News & World Report, recalled that Congress had passed a resolution saying the United States would consider Soviet placement of offensive weapons in Cuba as an act of war.

" . . . It's very unfortunate we didn't go ahead then and clean up Castro and the Communists and the missiles all at one time when we had reason for doing it," he said.

"I think it would have had a very salutary effect all over the entire world and probably would have avoided a number of Viet-Nams in the future," he added.

Later, Russell was asked whether he felt the U.S. action in Cuba prompted leaders of Communist North Viet-Nam to misinterpret U.S. determination to defeat them in South Viet-Nam.

He replied: "I do. Yes, sir, I do."

Russell, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, also said: "I begged the President (John F. Kennedy) on bended knees to go ahead . . . and to wind up that Cuban episode while we had a reason for doing it."

Mr. Kennedy demanded that Russia remove its missiles, and the Soviets were reported to have complied. An on-site inspection was agreed to between Russia and the United States, but has not been carried out.